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Sea Islanders NN23

[For segregation policies imposed by White
South Carolinians on the Sea Islanders, see
Category 177.]

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

*Yamacraw**

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[103] YAMACRAW TAKES ITS NAME FROM THE LITTLE IN-
dian town that Tomochichi, chief and friend of General
Oglethorpe, established on the Savannah River bluff west of
the township of Savannah over two hundred years ago. To-
day waterfront industries have pushed the Negro district
southward from the bluff, but it is still so close to the river
that some of the small shanties rattle when winds roar across
the water.

621 In this community the residents are drawn largely from coastal counties of Georgia and South Carolina. At one time (368) an unruly element gained Yamacraw the reputation of being the toughest section of Savannah, but the presence of an unusual number of churches of various denominations seems to have improved law and order in recent years. Intense religious interest is aided by pride felt in the fact that the first 771 Negro Baptist church in America was established here and also that Methodism gained an earlier start among Yamacraw Negroes than in any other part of the county.

In spite of the difference in religious doctrines there seem to be certain common beliefs handed down in families. We found an implicit and readily asserted faith in the power "tuh do unnatchul ting." Ghosts are everyday experiences. Root doctors are in constant demand.

* Old Yamacraw has gone. Since late in 1939 there has been a radical physical change under the program of the Federal Housing Administration. Two thirds of the tumble-down brick houses and wooden shanties in the once crowded area have been replaced by modern concrete buildings with low rentals for Negro tenants.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
 NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
 South Carolina
 Johns Island

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Mrs. Ethel Grimboll

THAT IS GREAT PROGRESS

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When I walk on Johns Island and I stand in the yard and look at the nursing home, look at the lab, look at the clinic, and look across the street at the housing project, I feel like that is great progress. I'm sure that the low cost housing project added ten to twenty years to the life span of a lot of those people who live there because of the living conditions they had prior to that. They feel comfortable, they feel more secure, and they feel good about themselves. And then if anyone gets sick or doesn't feel well, all they have to do is walk across the street to the clinic. And that is great progress.

There's a fight right now to keep it going, because of political reasons, but it's still great progress. That was one of the things my father spoke about—the health care on these islands. I wish he were here to see it.*

*Mrs. Grimboll is the daughter of Esau Jenkins.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,2-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mr. William Saunders

THE SEA ISLAND HEALTH CARE CORPORATION WAS A POWER BASE

178 I think the housing, the health care facility, you have to look at it as an
185 elevation, an improvement. We had the foresight with the health center to
94 add the nursing home and the home for the elderly, so even when they took
(734) our health center grant away from us, we owned the building and we owned
(737) the property. The health center is now being run by the City of Charleston.
(665) The taking over was really a political party fight. In 1980 the Republican party
needed to be able to say that they got something going on in the community,
so what they did, they found problems with a lot of stuff that was already
there—got rid of the Board, got a new Board, and allowed it to function.

185 Anytime you're talking about being able to control something, anytime
941 you're talking about power, then you're talking about something real that was
done. The Sea Island Health Care Corporation was a power base that we put
together that exists. It really exists today. We've got forty acres of very choice
land. The city now wants twelve acres of it. That's the kind of thing where
Esau and others were thinking ahead and did things in advance, and we
planned that one way ahead of everybody. And it's there. We've got control of
the nursing home and the housing.

Mr. William Saunders

THERE'S A LOT OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEALTH AND POVERTY

Our goal for the Comprehensive Health Center was that it would serve
everybody on the islands and would be totally independent. The first direc-
tor, Jim Martin, was a real strategist. He and I used to spend hours dreaming
and scheming about what could be, how you could work politically within the
system and make things work. Jim was a past master at that.

(758) Beyond just providing health services, for awhile the Health Care Cor-
(464) poration was the biggest employer on the island. We found that when people
were working, they were healthier simply because they were making their
own living. There's a lot of relationship between health and poverty.

741 We were looking to be able to sell health care to Kiawah and to Seabrook
758 and to the other big interests on the island, which would have actually made
943 the health center self-sufficient. You would not have needed any governmen-
(422) tal money. We were just about there when they took it away from us. We don't
have control of the daily operation of the clinic. But the people who are using
it have to pay us rent. It's a good bit less service than it used to be. But it
could come back. The whole facility is there, so the possibilities are un-
limited.

Mrs. Bernice Robinson

**ALL THIS IS AN OUTGROWTH OF PEOPLE
FEELING EMPOWERED**

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On Johns Island you see the results now really, the aggressiveness of the people and the confidence they had in moving forward, when you look at the sea island clinic, and you look at the senior citizen center and the nursing home and the housing project for senior citizens. All this is an outgrowth of people feeling empowered by being able to read and write and understanding how to go about pressing for things like that. They became very active in the PTA and things that they didn't bother with before because they couldn't read or they couldn't understand what was going down. Before they had a high school on the island, a lot of people who had relatives over here in the city would send the children over here to go to school, to try to get an education. And they had to do that for a long time before they got the high school.

But all these things that finally came about, came about from these same people that learned how to read and write and fight for their kids to get a decent education right in their own home rather than having to cross the bridge to come into town to get an education.

Mrs. Ethel Grimboll

**WE'RE GOING TO VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATES
WE WANT**

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People are still voting today. Blacks now rule Wadmalaw Island for the Democratic party. Before this, the white people in the Democratic party brought a slate in and then they immediately passed that slate. My father and others said, "We're not going to go along with a slate that they bring in. We're going to vote for the candidates we want." And that's how we changed that situation on Wadmalaw Island. After the voter registration drives, the people got more interested in the importance of voting. Therefore, we got a lot of people on the books. Eighty-five percent of the population on Wadmalaw is black. Most of the whites left the Democratic party when the blacks got control of it. Before that the whites ruled everything on Wadmalaw Island. It was the tradition.

6: Smith

I,Y-5

(no date) 1989

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their time and energy in interviewing the leadership personnel of each island, and consequently relied quite heavily on the estimations they provided. The error possibilities which accompany this procedure as the basis for later projection statements are well noted.

HOUSING ON THE SEA ISLANDS

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There are 11,557 housing units on the five Sea Islands. The median number of persons per unit is 4.01; 3,743 of these units are occupied by Black families. The median number of persons per Black occupied unit is 4.65.

The by island breakdown shows a total of 6,642 units on James Island. One thousand one hundred and twenty-eight of the total are units occupied by Black families. There are 4.63 Blacks and 3.64 Whites per units.

Johns Island has a total of 1,875 units, with 4.01 persons per unit. Blacks occupy 678 of these units and there are 4.58 Blacks per unit.

Wadmalaw Island has 477 units and 4.24 persons per unit. Three hundred and seventy-two of these units are Black occupied, with 4.62 persons per unit.

Yonges Island has 2,224 units and 4.15 persons per unit. Blacks occupy 1,326 of these units; there are 4.78 Blacks per unit.

There are 329 units on Edisto Island, and 4.18 persons per unit. The persons per unit average for Black household

6: Smith

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● 362 is 4.67. Edisto has 239 Black occupied units.

Precise data on the secondary characteristics of Black Sea Island housing units were unavailable. The following figures are based on a total of 3,685 rural units and 613 rural farm units in Charleston County and can consequently serve only as a general indicator for the secondary characteristics of Black Sea Island households. Only 1,547 of the rural units have all plumbing facilities. One thousand three hundred and eighty-six of these units are renter occupied. The overwhelming majority (3,381) of the units have no inside water facilities. One thousand six hundred and forty-five of the units were constructed before 1939 and 1,384 between 1940 and 1949. One thousand three hundred and twenty-seven of the units are valued at less than \$5,000. The median size of rural units is 4.05 rooms.

Of a total of 18,952 Black occupied units in the county, 8,142 units are owner occupied. Of the owner occupied units 2,988 were occupied in 1949 or earlier and 1,069 of the renters have a similar residency pattern. The median size of all Black occupied units is 4.7 rooms. The median size of owner occupied units is 5.7 and 4.0 for renter units. The median monthly rent paid is \$41.00 for units without and \$48.00 for units with all plumbing facilities.

6: Smith

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Structure and Content of Household Units

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The traditional family household is situated in a large gap. Three, five or more units may have been built in this gap. This would be the home of one family. These units may be either individual and/or units with multiple extensions. The general patterns of these units is circular to semi-circular. The units themselves are wood structures built in a block "A" fashion. This structure is pilloved off the ground some twenty-two inches. Those units built in the fifties to early sixties were but cinder block models of this basic structure. Out at an extreme point of the semi-circle sits a half blocked "A" structure, the "outhouse." More, inside plumbing units are being added on to houses, but the outhouse is commonly seen. Inside these older units some families have both gas and stove cooking options. 354
362 Exclusive use of the pot belly stove may be the dominant habits in some sectors. Only use of gas stoves would be the more probable behavior of James Island residents. This is likely because wood is not as available. On James Island 362 there is less wooded acreage, but newer and more expensive units. The floor space in many of these older and more commonly seen dwellings is some nine feet wide by thirty odd feet long. This space tends to be divided into living room, kitchen and one or two bedrooms. These units contain the minimum of old furniture and a heater.

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There are also those units which are adequately furnished, and contain inside plumbing facilities. These homes tend to be new or recently improved. Built during the 1950's, more of the middle age islanders live in houses of this type.

Some sections contain new or recently built homes; these are more rarely seen and tend to be occupied by islanders in their late twenties and thirties who have been employed at an adequate wage over a period of years.

A SUMMARY STATEMENT

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The roots of exploitation are deep on the Sea Islands. That information and those program services which would help ease the yokes of oppression are but slowly being metered into the community. In the mist of this oppression, the islanders continue to show spirited strength in maintaining traditional family patterns and the unique customs. They are not diving foolishly into imitation of the suburban elements to which they are gaining greater exposure. Certainly features of the suburban life style are and will continue to be adopted into native family patterns. But these elements will be added with modification. It is too early to speculate on the forms these modifications will take. However, it is rather certain that these elements of suburbanisation which would drastically effect the traditional functioning and design of island families if, ventured into